**City of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota**

**Case Study Title**: Stronger and Wiser as a Whole: How Government Thrives with Thoughtful Meeting Facilitation

**Case Study Category**: Organizational Wellness

**Jurisdiction Name**: City of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

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Please consider this application for an Innovation Award and the Rapid Fire Session.

**Initiative Overview:**

The City of Brooklyn Park is unlearning decades of standard government meeting practices for both internal and external meetings. Specifically, in the last four years, we trained over 30 city staff from various departments in professional facilitation and participatory meeting methods to provide a real tool that allows staff to authentically engage one another and the community and produce meaningful and tangible results and meeting outcomes.

The results of the facilitation methods have been impactful and profound. Meetings now have strategic purpose and intent as to not waste anyone’s time; meetings are no longer dominated by one person or group of people; meetings are often facilitated by a neutral person with no interest or stake in the outcome; groups create their own motivation by building consensus; unproductive conflict disappears; and there is increased productivity as the outcomes and next steps are clear by the end of the meeting. The facilitation methods support staff in fulfilling the City’s leadership philosophy in that ***“we are stronger and wiser as a whole and together can achieve things unattainable by an individual.”***

**Costs/Savings:**

The cost savings are transparent in that there is more effective use of staff resources when directions are clearly set and we avoid spinning wheels in unproductive meetings. Further, by investing in the professional development and creativity of our city staff, we increase the retention in our workforce.

**Outcomes:**

The outcomes of utilizing staff as professional facilitators include meaningful conversations; consensus in decision-making; and a clear plan of action including tasks and responsibilities from each member. Also, by utilizing these participatory methods, it obtains buy-in from each member including a sense of contribution, pride, and accountability. It changes the meeting environment from being dull and unproductive to being lively, engaging and promotes individual and collective thought and participation.

Staff has utilized these facilitation methods to create job descriptions; craft expenditure policies; obtain staff feedback on a new system/policy; plan events; develop a marketing/branding campaign; sustain motivation in work teams; coalesce various commission/groups into addressing a common issue; and address issues of prioritization in the City. Trained staff members support one other and continue to improve their facilitation techniques with each meeting or event, which builds the capacity of the organization to do effective meeting facilitation that leads to effective outcomes.

**Innovation:**

The consensus building, participatory methods changes the way staff makes decisions and impacts how staff assists elected leaders in decision making. The tools also provide a better way for staff to engage the community in authentic, consensus-based decision-making.

In addition, building effective meeting facilitation capacity internally means staff can do its best work every day. It gives staff teams the tools they need to communicate, identify and resolve problems early, and be strategic in their actions.

The characteristics and benefits of the methods are as follows, which have significantly improved the dialogue and outcomes of our organization:

**The Focused Conversation Method** - a meaningful exchange of ideas by:
• Conducting purposeful discussions
• Capturing a group's best thinking easily
• Surfacing new ideas and solutions

**The Consensus Workshop Method -** engages people into getting to consensus by:
• Integrating diverse ideas
• Generating practical and creative solutions
• Developing group consensus

**The Action Planning Method -** help groups plan, organize resources and build commitment by:
• Analyzing the current reality
• Creating a practical plan
• Maximizing group involvement

**Obstacles:**

The greatest challenge is time. It can take as much time to prepare for the meetings utilizing these methods as it does to actually holding the meetings. However, by preparing in advance, it keeps the meetings focused, structured, participatory, and results-oriented. In fact, focused conversations actually lead to shorter and more productive meetings. Often times, people don’t realize how much has been achieved or decided within a meeting while experiencing the process until it’s done.

**Presentation Style:**

The presenters will use the participatory methods described above during the session to allow participants to experience the methods in action. This includes using a “sticky wall,” colorful paper, and markers so that participants can put their ideas up on the wall and be active participants in the facilitated discussion. The session will also include story-telling to explain how the methods have shaped the City of Brooklyn Park’s team processes and to engage attendees. Examples of the methods in action are attached.